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A CRY OUT OF THE DARK. By Henry Bailey Stevens. Boston, Mass.: The Four Seas Company. 1919. Pp. 88.

This volume contains three one-act plays, all three motivated by a strong aversion to the idea of war. Although the author as a dramatist is justified in foreshortening his pictures and somewhat distorting his character-reactions, yet he is less justified in doing so as an expositor of the pacific philosophy. The artist-interpreter of war, as the reviewer has tried to show elsewhere, will not quarrel about professional or political attitudes toward war. He will see war now as a great and gallant adventure, now as an inevitable molecular movement, now as the abomination of desolation, now as the noun corresponding to the adjective dynamic, now as an inalienable condition of existence, and now as an international Mr. Hyde emerging from a too trustful Dr. Jekyll and 'reeling back into the beast'.

Of Mr. Stevens's deep earnestness there can be no question. He loathes war so utterly that he sees it constantly as a chronic "crowd disease akin to epileptic insanity. Every nation that starts out to fight another with the tremendous claws of its army is criminally insane." And of 'excuses' he declares that none "is big enough to make up for this terrific crime—the impulse that sends an army out to wreak organized, deliberate murder, to lay waste a continent, to kill and kill and kill other groups of men that belong to the same great human family." But "so long as there is hope for the individual, there is hope for the race. We may not see how or whence, but it is there. It is for those who see to bring the nations before the judgment of Intelligent Man." There must follow frankly complete disarmament, and intoxicating liquors, narcotics, harmful drugs, and venereal ills must all be abolished. The patient must be given an adequate chance to free himself from the hereditary taints of the ages, to avoid the periodicity of his insane attacks, and to establish a new, firmly rational habit of life and thought.

These little plays are well wrought in point of dialogue and structure. The first, *The Meddler*, is the most genuinely dramatic of the three. Under the figure of an impending duel between two individuals war is considered and denounced. The Scholar, the Doctor, the Minister—all the responsible privileged classes—

support the necessity of the duel, however anachronistic. When the Meddler—the spirit of Christ—appears, there occur a clash of wills and conflict of actions that result in his imprisonment while the duellists and their friends depart for the scene of action.

*Bolo and Babette* is a better allegory, but a poorer acting play. It has a good deal of phrasal beauty, and its suggestions touching the Pasture where a certain group of children live (beyond the valley of the world of children at large) and the footprints of the Grown-up Person (any true idealist, not merely an inherited or even elected Chief) that lead into the sheer mountains, from peak to possible peak, for ever, are pointed and stimulating. The chief weaknesses here are (1) the use of more characters than can be skilfully handled within so brief a compass; and (2) the touch of complacency in the conception of the Pasture, a complacency that is, curiously enough, implicitly rebuked by the author himself in *The Madhouse* when he speaks of that “exaggerated self-esteem which in an individual would be insufferable conceit.”

In the third play—*The Madhouse*—we have an expository dramatized tract, with only a very slight tinge of action, but with war in the background as an enveloping action contrasting with the peaceful quiet of the asylum. The chief persons are Dr. Jovier, who professionally analyzes the madness of war (“So far as I can see,” says the Soldier, who has pursued his enemy into the grounds and has slain him there, “for all your scientific lingo, when you come right down to the point, you’re nothing but a new-fangled preacher.”), and Jeanson, a thoughtful visitor. The strength and the weakness of the purely pacific position exhibit themselves here more plainly than in the preceding plays. Its strength lies in its insistence on the *irrationality* of military and naval war, its weakness in its failure to recognize the existence of natural forces that condition this irrationality, and that require identification of the perhaps humanly ineradicable war *idea*, and its diversion into clearly wholesome activities,—activities not repugnant to the even more fundamental idea of love.

This group of plays may be usefully compared with Hermann Hagedorn’s *Makers of Madness*, Israel Zangwill’s *The War God*, and Katrina Trask’s *In the Vanguard*.

G. H. C.